

REASONS FOR THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION

IN

THE NEW ULM - MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY AREA.

FOR

PROFESSOR EDWARD FREDRICH

BY

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4/6/79

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In paging through the annals of history regarding the Missouri - Wisconsin split, one couldn't help but sense the heart-rending, faith-testing trials that many pastors faced. Perhaps the most difficult times were endured by those men who severed their fellowship with the LC-MS, the WELS and the ELS and formed what is known today as the Church of the Lutheran Confession. It is these men and the history that they made with which my thesis deals.

I propose to answer the question, "Why was the CLC founded in the New Ulm - Minnesota River Valley area?" In order to do that we will recast the stage on which this history took place.

In 1935 the United Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church each extended invitations to various Lutheran church bodies for discussions looking towards the establishment of closer relations. The Missouri Synod accepted the invitations of the ULCA and the ALC declaring:

- "5. Whereas, our Synod has always recognized the desirability of the conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith... and a united defense against schism and sectarianism...; and
6. Whereas, God pleasing, Scriptural external union and co-operation is based upon external unity, oneness in faith, confession, doctrine and practice; therefore be it
7. Resolved, That we declare our willingness to confer with other Lutheran bodies on problems of Lutheran union with a view towards effecting true unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions."¹

In the years 1935-38, Missouri's Committee on Lutheran Church Union met six times with the ALC Commission. The result of these meetings was expressed in the form of a "declaration" by the ALC Commissioners. In this document the ALC men especially indicated their attitude towards the "Brief Statement" which was a doctrinal document adopted by the Missouri Synod in 1932. It should be noted that the "Brief Statement" had also been approved by the synods of the Synodical Conference of which WELS and ELS were members.

¹Theodore A. Aaberg, A City Set on a Hill, (Lake Mills, Iowa: Graphic Publishing Co. Inc., 1968) pp 135-136.

To sum up the "Declaration", the ALC Commissioners pointed out that they were in agreement with the "Brief Statement" except for the doctrines concerning the Church and the Last Things, and here they asked for toleration, stating, "With reference to Sections III (The Church) and VI, B (Antichrist, conversion of Israel, physical resurrection of Israel, thousand years of Rev. 20), we expect no more than this, that the Honorable Synod of Missouri will declare that the points mentioned there are not disruptive of church-fellowship."²

In response to the "Declaration" Missouri submitted four points to the ALC Commissioners in which they noted that the establishment of church-fellowship would depend 1) on the action taken by the two bodies in regard to the "Brief Statement" and the "Declaration" 2) as well as on the establishment of doctrinal agreement with the aforementioned "Brief Statement" and the "Declaration" on the part of those church bodies with which the ALC is in fellowship, 3) and that this whole matter, including the "Declaration"... must be submitted for approval to the other synods constituting the Synodical Conference, 4) and meanwhile until church-fellowship has been officially established, the pastors of both church bodies meet in smaller circles... to discuss both the doctrinal basis for union and the questions of church practice. The ALC Commissioners agreed to the four points.³

In the 1938 St. Louis Convention, the Missouri Synod resolved to adopt the entire report of its Floor Committee on Intersynodical and Doctrinal matters, which included the statement that it found "in the position of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church ie. the "Declaration"... an agreement in the doctrinal statements concerning teachings disputed in the past or still in debate in some actions of the LCA, notably in the doctrine of inspiration, predestination, and conversion, Sunday, and the

² Ibid., p. 141.

³ Ibid., p. 141.

office of the public administration of the means of grace."⁴ It also resolved to give tolerance to the ALC for certain teachings and interpretations which were rejected previously in the Missouri circles and further resolved that these doctrines did not need to be decisive of church-fellowship.

In granting this much, the Missouri Synod had done all that the ALC Commissioners had set down as a prerequisite for the ALC's entrance into pulpit and altar fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

By this action in 1938, Missouri had compromised her doctrinal position by stating that it found in the "Declaration" an agreement in the doctrinal statements concerning teachings disputed in the past or still in debate.

In view of this situation the WELS at its 1939 Convention, noted that the ALC, in adopting the "Brief Statement", had shown that it was to be viewed in the light of the "Declaration"; that it had refused to give up its membership in the American Lutheran Conference, and that it had reached an agreement with the ULCA on inspiration (the "Pittsburg Agreement") which lacked clear confession in the inerrancy of the Scripture. Because of these problems the WELS was of the opinion that the doctrinal basis established by Missouri and the ALC was not acceptable.⁵

This began the long hard struggle in the Synodical Conference. In the 1940 Chicago Convention the S.C. appealed to the Missouri Synod not to enter into fellowship (prayer, altar, pulpit) with the ALC until the matters objected to by the other members of the Conference had been clarified and the whole matter presented once more to the S.C.

Between the years from 1940-1953, it became increasingly clear that the Missouri Synod was undergoing a change in its long-standing conservative confessionalism. It became increasingly apparent that Missouri had lost its ability to handle error directly and succinctly as evidenced by the way they handled the 44 and their "Statement" which supported the false position of

⁴ Ibid., p. 142.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 145-146.

the ALC in matters pertaining to church fellowship. Because this case was not dealt with correctly, the errors it propounded were allowed to spread among the ranks in the LC-MS.

At its 1950, Milwaukee Convention, the Missouri Synod adopted the "Common Confession" which had been jointly produced by the ALC and Missouri men who were on the Committee on Doctrinal Unity of Synod and on the Committee on Fellowship of the American Lutheran Church.

In 1951 the WELS also rejected the "Common Confession" as a settlement of doctrinal differences with the ALC, resolving:

That we inform the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod that we not only find the Common Confession to be inadequate... but that we also hold that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation, since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which in fact are not settled.

That we ask the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to repudiate its stand that the Common Confession is a settlement of the doctrines treated by the two committees (Mo.-ALC)⁶

So we can see how the tension was building within these thirteen years from 1940-1953. *It is not* necessary to go into all the details in this period of time so I just mentioned the most important happenings and developments which affected the Synodical Conference.

1953 is a good place to pick up the CLC story because it was around this time when consciences began to be pricked concerning the Missouri problem and the way Wisconsin and the ELS were handling the situation. The "52" Synodical Conference especially brought these two synods to arms when their honest opinions were totally rejected concerning the "Common Confession".

Because of this progression of events, the WELS in its 1953 Convention declared itself to be in "statu confessionis" with the LC-MS. It was at this convention that Winfred Schaller^{Jr.} publicly protested our fellowshiping with

⁶ Proceedings of the Wisconsin Synod, pp. 147-148.

the LC-MS on the grounds of Rom. 16:17&18. He eventually became one of the founding members of the CLC.

Since the 1954 Synodical Conference did not help solve any of the matters at hand, the ELS, in the following year, under the presiding of C.M. Gullerud, suspended fellowship with the LC-MS on the basis of Rom. 16:17-18. In 1959 Pastor C.M. Gullerud left the ELS because in his eyes they did not suspend fellowship with the Synodical Conference and He became one of the founding fathers of the CLC. Because of its small size, the ELS was able to get together easier and come to a majority agreement to break with Missouri sooner than WELS could.

In 1955 Prof. E. Reim, then president of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and chairman of the Wisconsin Synod's Doctrinal Unity Committee, commended the Norwegians in the Northwestern Lutheran for their doctrinal stand in meeting a major test magnificently. "They have measured up! God grant that we do as well when the time for our decision comes."⁷ In Prof Reim's eyes the WELS did not measure up in its handling of the Missouri problem. He parted fellowship with Wisconsin in 1957 at the New Ulm Convention.

In the same year that Prof. Reim's article appeared in the Northwestern Lutheran, the WELS held its biannual Convention at Saginaw, Mich. The motion to suspend fellowship with the LC-MS was held in abeyance until the special 1956 meeting held in Watertown. Because of this action several men went on record as protesting members of the WELS. Some of these men were Prof. E. Reim, Pastor M.J. Witt, President of the Pacific-Northwest District, along with his congregation at Spokane, Wash., and again Pastor Winfred Schaller of Cheyenne, Wyoming. All of them cited Rom. 16:17-18 as the scriptural reason for their action and for the WELS "lack" of action.

⁷Theodore A. Aaberg, Op. Cit., p. 196.

In the 1956 LC-MS Convention it looked as if they had taken some steps forward in resolving their problems. In view of this action the WELS, in their special convention at Watertown, looked upon this action as a "ray of hope" and resolved not to suspend fellowship with Missouri but to continue its protesting fellowship.

"It was in this year, on Oct. 30, that Immanuel Congregation of Mankato, Minnesota withdrew from the Wisconsin Synod because of Wisconsin's 'failure' to take decisive action in severing relations with the Missouri Synod because of that synod's persistent adherence to its unionist practices -- common confession, joint prayer, scouting, chaplaincy and others."⁸ The two pastors of the congregation were Gerv. Fischer and Gordon Radtke who also withdrew from the WELS.

It is Immanuel Congregation which played a key role in the formation of the CLC in the Minnesota River Valley area. Because of its size, app. 1,000 communicants at the time, Immanuel became the center or drawing card for those men who later came to the same conviction that WELS had not acted soon enough to suspend fellowship with Missouri.

It was the 1957 WELS Convention at New Ulm that saw more men break fellowship with the Synod. The Synod resolved to continue its "vigorously protesting fellowship" with the LC-MS. Because of this decision several men broke with WELS because in their eyes the Synod had not taken the proper action that Rom 16:17-18 called for. Prof. E. Reim was one of these men along with Pastor M.J. Witt, President of the Pacific-Northwest Conference, Pastor Paul Albrecht, President of the Dakota-Montana District, and Pastor Winfred Schaller Jr. of Cheyenne, Wyoming. It was this group of men that eventually brought the CLC into existence. Later that year Prof. Winfred Schaller Sr. of Winnebago Academy also joined these men. Missionary Fred Tiefel of Japan had also left the WELS fellowship in January of 1957.

⁸ Lowell Schreyer, "Our Congregations", The Lutheran Spokesman, June 1959, pp. 13-14.

These men were drawn together along with other pastors and concerned laymen who were of the same mind and judgment. "Free conferences" or "Interim meetings" as they called them, were held by these people who had left fellowship with the LC-MS, WELS, and ELS. The first meeting of this kind was held at Lyons, Nebraska, in Oct. of 57. Pastor T. Pederson was the pastor of the congregation that hosted the meeting. Another meeting was held at Mankato, Minnesota, on December 4-5, of the same year. Immanuel Lutheran Church hosted the meeting. It was at this meeting that provisions were made to support the Japan Mission and its Pastor F. Tiefel. Their major concern in this meeting was to draw up a statement on the doctrine of fellowship which eventually became known by the title, "Concerning Church Fellowship".⁹

Meetings were also held on the West Coast at Trinity Lutheran Church in Spokane, Washington, on November 18&19, 1957. Meetings were also held at Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Opportunity, Washington, on January 23-24, 1958.¹⁰

A Free conference was held at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cheyenne, Wyoming, where Pastor Winfred Schaller Jr. was serving. This meeting took place on May 6-8, 1958. From this meeting the first issue of The Lutheran Spokesman was launched. It eventually became the official organ of the CLC.¹¹

On July 30-Aug. 4, 1958, another meeting was held at Spokane Washington.¹²

On January 13-15, 1959, another Interim meeting was held at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota. Pastor Fischer had passed away in June of the previous year so Pastor Gordon Radtke was serving the congregation alone. The record shows that 21 pastors, 7 teachers, 16 lay people and 4 seminary students were registered as participants. It was at this meeting that Immanuel Lutheran Congregation began to take the lead role in the educational training of high school, college, and seminary students. The

⁹C. M. Gullerud, "The History of the CLC", presented at teachers conference.(?) p 3.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹Ibid., p. 5.

¹²Ibid., p.6.

need for higher-education was brought to the attention of those assembled. Since the framing of a confessional statement had not as yet been concluded, the conference did not take action to establish a school at this point.¹³

However,

since the need was pressing and could not be left hanging until a synodical organization would be effected with it confessional basis established, a group of lay people of the Mankato congregation (Immanuel) stepped into the breach and formed an association for the purpose of founding a school-Immanuel Lutheran College. This institution initiated its work of training the youth with a special service of dedication and installation on Sunday, September 13, 1959. On September 16, the College and Seminary Departments were opened.¹⁴

The first professor of the ILC was Professor E. Reim.

In 1959 more pastors from the WELS and ELS joined this small group of people. "They were Pastor Rollin Reim, New Ulm; Rev. Egbert Schaller, Nicollet; Rev. Paul Nolting, Sleepy Eye; Rev. C.M. Gullerud, Mankato; Rev. Roland Gurgel, Belle Plaine; and Prof. Martin Galstead of DMLC,"¹⁵ It is interesting to note that all of these men were situated in the Minnesota River Valley area.

A key figure among these men was Pastor C.M. Gullerud, a member of the ELS until this year and pastor of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato and the Salem Lutheran Church in Eagle Lake, Minnesota. He says in regard to his decision to leave the ELS,

I was indeed one of those who withdrew from the ELS in 1959 because I could not share the stand which that church body espoused at its convention of that year in the matter of its relationship with the LC-MS within the frame-work of the Synodical Conference. I had attended the Interim meetings of the previous years. My association with Immanuel congregation was a continuation of the fellowship which we had enjoyed through the years. I was subsequently called to teach part-time in Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary and later full-time in the Seminary. I also became one of the charter members of the CLC.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁵ Mark Krueger, "The Cost in Pastors, Professors, Teachers, and Congregations in Connection with our Severance of Fellowship with the Missouri Synod", Church History Report. April 30, 1974. p. 3

¹⁶ C.M. Gullerud, personal communication.

Prof. Gullerud is presently the President of the ILC which has been relocated in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

In August of 1959, the seventh meeting was held at Red Wing, Minnesota.¹⁷

The eighth conference was again held at Mankato, Minnesota on January 19-21, 1960. At this meeting it was resolved to accept the invitation of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Watertown, South Dakota, to hold the next scheduled meeting there. On August 9-12, 1960, the Constituting Convention of the CLC was held at Watertown.

As an outgrowth and culmination of many meetings held during preceding months of preparation and concentrated study and discussion, brethren from as far west as the State of Washington and from as far east as the state of Michigan, as well as from the deep south, namely the state of Florida, gathered in convention as the invited guests of Trinity Lutheran Church of Watertown, South Dakota. Under the blessing and guidance of God this meeting together with the recessed sessions at Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, proved to be the organizing convention of the CLC.¹⁸

On January 24-26, 1961, the recessed convention was held at Sleepy Eye.

The author of this article happened to be living there at the time, although he remembers nothing about those days. The membership committee reported that 33 congregations had applied for membership in the CLC.

From this historical sketch of the formation of the CLC, I have drawn three main reasons why the CLC was founded in the New Ulm area. The most important reason, as I can gather from the historical evidence, is the key role that Immanuel Congregation of Mankato played. They happened to be one of the first congregations to leave the WELS, the date being, Oct. 30, 1956. Immanuel is the oldest congregation in Mankato, having been established in 1867. It was well established and had considerable influence in the Mankato area. It had approximately 1,000 communicants at the time it left WELS. Because of its size and importance, it became a drawing force for those who

¹⁷ C.M. Gullerud, Op. Cit., p.8.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

were of a like mind and conviction. Its bold example had an influence on the pastors and congregations in the area. Undoubtedly Immanuel's Pastors, G. Fischer and Gordon Radtke, must have let their confessional stance be known and invited those who were of a like mind and conviction to join them. Immanuel's size and financial clout proved to be quite a help in regard to the educational needs of the children from high school to seminary^{ages}. It was Immanuel who footed the bill for the ILC which opened its doors on Sept. 16, 1959. Immanuel Lutheran College became the theological center with Prof. E. Reim as its head. The school undoubtedly had a stabilizing effect as the CLC was forming itself into a church body. Immanuel happens to be the largest congregation in the CLC today. I believe that Immanuel Lutheran Congregation was the single most important reason why the CLC was founded in the New Ulm - Minnesota River Valley area.

The second and third reasons that I see for the founding of the CLC in the New Ulm area are sort of inter-related. The second reason is an obvious one which Pastor Gullerud suggested to me in his letter. He writes:

The reason would be that invitations for the constituting convention were received from Watertown, South Dakota, congregation where the first meeting was held and then from the congregation in Sleepy Eye, where the adjourned meeting was convened at a later date. No doubt these invitations were accepted because these locations were most readily accesible to the congregations that were involved.¹⁹

The majority of the congregations involved happened to be in the New Ulm area which is only fifteen miles from Sleepy Eye. Now, why were the majority of the CLC congregations located in this area? This leads to my third and final point.

This third point is more theory than proven fact but nevertheless needs mentioning. This point has to do with the family ties that bound some of the formulators of the CLC together. After Prof. E. Reim declared himself outside of the WELS at the 1957 convention in New Ulm along with Winfred Schaller Jr., we see a kind of domino effect take place within these two families.

¹⁹C.M. Gullerud, personal letter, Op. Cit.,

Prof. Reim's son, Rollin of New Ulm, put his congregation to the vote on whether to leave the synod or not. He was defeated. In 1959 he left the fellowship of the Synod. Rollin Reim's brother-in-law, Egbert Schaller, brother of Winfred Schaller Jr. and son of W. Schaller Sr., also broke in this year. Winfred Schaller Sr. of Winnebago Academy had severed relations with the WELS several months after the 57 New Ulm convention. His son, Egbert, was pastor at Nicollet which is only fifteen miles from New Ulm.

Prof. E. Reim had no doubt taught most of these men at the Seminary in Thiensville and they respected his decision. Putting the best construction on these two families who had members closely involved in the Missouri situation, one would have to say that because of that primary involvement, the rest of the family members were moved to study the Missouri problem closer than the average WELS pastor. No doubt the subject would come up in family gatherings or correspondence. Whatever the situation was, these men must have been convinced by their studies that Rom. 16:17-18 should have been put into effect immediately by the WELS. In talking with Prof. C. Lawrenz on this point, He was very careful to point out that the members of these two families made earnest and conscientious studies on the doctrinal points involved in the Missouri situation. They came to their own independent conclusions. *Not all the Schallers broke from the WELS.*

I think one can not simply eliminate the fact that the Schallers and the Reims were the mainstay of the CLC in those formative years. With three of these men in the New Ulm area, they had opportunity to speak with others about their stand. Pastor Paul Nolting of Sleep Eye, fifteen miles west of New Ulm, also joined their ranks in 1959. Pastor Duehlmeir of Sanborn left the WELS in 1960.

who were of the same conviction

With the majority of the pastors and congregations^A in the New Ulm - Minnesota River Valley area, and with ILC in Mankato, it was only logical that the CLC be founded in this area.

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